

The Vedanta of the Yogavasistha.

by

B. L. ATREYA, M. A., D. LITT.

Leaving aside the older Upanishads the *Yogavasistha* is perhaps the oldest systematic work on what is now known as “the Vedantic view” of life. It was written long before the age of the ‘Acharyas’ of Vedantic thought, and its philosophy is more akin to that of the Upanishads than that of any of the later ‘Schools’ of Vedanta. Hence it deserves to be carefully studied. It is a huge work of 32,000 slokas, written in a literary style. In this article an attempt is made to present its philosophical doctrines in a brief but comprehensive outline.

In the *Yogavasistha* an attempt is made to describe the teachings of the sage Vasistha to his illustrious pupil, Prince Ramachandra of the ancient kingdom of Ayodhya. Rama represents the unenlightened individual*[*The above description should not be taken to mean that Sri Ramachandra was really unenlightened. He was God Himself, the Bestower of Enlightenment, and it was just for the sake of Lila and with a view to enlightening the world that He assumed the role of an unenlightened individual.-Editor] awakened only to the miserable plight of life and eager to find out a way out of it, and Vasistha is the enlightened teacher who knows all that is worth knowing and who has attained Peace and Perfection. Rama has begun to reflect over the misery and sufferings of life and feels dissatisfied with it. This dissatisfaction finds expression in his conduct. Being asked by his teacher why he was not happy, he gives expression to his ideas in such words: - “What happiness can there be in this world, where everyone is born to die? (I.12.7). Everything here comes into existence only to pass away. There is no stability in our achievements (I.12.8). How foolish are we? Knowing the vanity of the affairs of life, we continue to be whole-heartedly engaged in them like fools (I.12.12). Even knowing well that there cannot be real and lasting joy in our life, we foolishly continue to hope for it (I.12.13). Accumulation of wealth does not make us happy, but miserable. Like a poisonous creeper, it hides within it the possibility of our ruin (I.13.10). Life is as evanescent as an autumnal cloud, as the light of an oil less lamp, and as ripples on the surface of water (I.14.6). Our mind is always restless like a caged lion (I.16.10). It falls to its object as passionately as a bird to its prey; but like a baby with his toys, it gets soon disgusted with it (I.16.22). Desire is as fickle as a monkey. It is never satisfied with the object which is already in hand, but jumps to others which are beyond our reach. The more it is satisfied the intense it grows (I.17.29). There is

The Vedanta of the Yogavasistha

nothing desirable in the body. It is an abode of disease, a source of all kinds of agonies and subject to wrinkles (I.18.34). Childhood is characterized by weakness, cravings, incapacity to speak, lack of knowledge, longing for unattainable things, fickleness of mind and helplessness (I.19.2). Youth comes like a flash of lightning, soon to be inevitably followed by the roars of the agonies of old age (I.20.8). It is pleasing only for some time, but soon turns into an evil (I.23.10). Bitterness of pain and suffering is the consequence of the pleasure of youth, which are pleasant only at their commencement (I.21.36). The poor rat of youth is soon devoured by the cat of old age, which takes delight in consuming the flesh of the body (I.22.25). At last, the cruel hand of death removes everything. It allows the creature only to ripe for its own use, as it were (I.26.6). Of what value is the body, the pleasures, the wealth and kingdom, when, early or late, death shall put an end to all? (I.18.37). Is there any direction where there is no suffering? Is there any creation which is not transitory? Is there any view which is free from error? And is there any transaction which is free from error? And is there any transaction which is free from deception? (I.27.31)”

Rama then asks his teacher earnestly: “Is there any better state of existence which may be absolutely free from suffering, ignorance and grief, and full of undecaying joy? (I.30.11). What is the spell by which the disease of worldliness – the source of all kinds of suffering – may be cured? (I.30.24). What is the method, the science, or the way, by which this life may be freed from undesirable consequences? (I.31.6). Initiate me into the Science of a perfectly happy life (I.31.17).

Vasistha was very much pleased to know that Discrimination and Discontent, which are the source of all spiritual attainments, have dawned upon the mind of the young pupil and that he keenly aspires to know the secret of Blissful Existence. He assures him that there is such a Science which enables a man to be free from suffering and pain, and this Science is the Science of the Self. Self-knowledge is the cure of all suffering and the source of happiness. This Science was taught to him by Brahma, the Creator of the world, at the very commencement of the Creation. Having taught the Science of the Self to him, the Creator asked him to live in the Bharatavarsha (India) and teach it to those who may be the proper and suitable recipients of it. The main principles of the Science of the Self taught to Rama by Vasistha are given below.

THE SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE

Direct Cognition or Intuition (*Pratyaksanubhava*) is the only and the ultimate source of all our knowledge, be it of an external object, Self or God. There is no other Pramana (source) through which new knowledge comes to us (III.42.15; II.19.16; VIb.52.29). If anything is not directly experienced by anybody, it cannot be made known to him by any description of it by others. The taste of sugar, for example, cannot be made known to one who has never himself tasted it (V.64.53). Others can give us only a hint or partial knowledge of things unknown to us by way of analogy and illustrations – *Upamana* and *Dristanta*. (II.18.51).

KNOWLEDGE PRESUPPOSES IDEALISTIC MONISM

Any relation between two things presupposes an identity behind them. Without a common substance immanent in both of them, two things cannot be related either as cause and effect or as subject and object. The knowledge of things around us and the relation of cause and effect obtaining between things of the world, therefore, leads us to a Monistic view of the Universe. The fact of knowledge further presupposes that the object of our knowledge cannot but be a modification of consciousness itself, i.e., an idea (*kalpana*). For knowledge can have for its object only that which is homogeneous with it in nature. All objects, therefore, along with the perceiving subjects, are idea of our consciousness. (III.121.37, 42, 53; VI b.25.14, 17; VI b. 38.9; VI b.101.54).

IDEALISM

The most outstanding feature of the philosophy of the *Yogavasistha* is *idealism*. Idealism is the keystone or the basic principle of its entire philosophy. The world of experience, with all things, time, space and natural laws, is a creation of mind, i.e., *idea* or *kalpana*. Everything is created by the mind just in the same way as the objects of dream are. Time is only a relation of succession of ideas. It is relative to the mind. An age may be experienced as a moment and a moment as an age in accordance with the moods of the mind. A moment of waking experience is often experienced as years in the dream. Space is relative to the mind and its ideas. Within a span the mind can have the experience of miles and miles can be experienced as a span only. Time and space together with objects cease to exist for a *Yogi* who passes into a thoughtless trance. The so-called Laws of Nature (*niyati*) are also ideas of uniform order of precedence and sequence. They hold a good only so far as the idea are manufactured in the furnace of the mind in the same order. But there is no reason why a

different order may not be introduced by the mind. The stability and persistence of the world are also ideas of the mind and they are as much imagined by the mind as the stability and persistence of the dream-world. (VI b. 210.11; IV. 47.48, 59; V. 48, 49; VI b. 42.16; VI b. 56.3; VI a. 61.29; VI a. 37.21; VI a.148.21; III.56.37; III.13.36; III.60.20-23,26; III.103.13; VI b.73.10,20).

SIMILARITY BETWEEN WAKING AND DREAM EXPERIENCE

There is little or no difference between the waking and dream experiences. Both are alike in their nature, as long as each lasts. From the standpoint of a higher realization, no difference is felt between the two. The difference is, however, felt from the standpoint of each other. The waking man considers the dream-experience as unreal and visionary; while to the subject of the dream, its own world is really real, and the waking experience is unreal and non-existent. When a person is on the death-bed, to him the entire life-experience of years seems to have passed away as a moment's dream. As hundreds of dreams are experienced within the waking age of our life, so hundreds, nay, thousands of waking dreams are experienced by the Self in its transmigratory journey. As we can recollect the many dreams that we have experienced throughout our life, so the enlightened ones (Siddhas) can remember the many waking dreams experienced by them during their past career. (IV. 29.11, 12; VI b.34.29, 30; IV.18.47).

SUBJECTIVE IDEALISM

According to the *Yogavasistha*, every individual perceives and cognizes only that which is within his own experience; no mind perceives aught but its own ideas. The world-experience of every individual has arisen individually to everyone. Every mind has the power to manufacture its own world. Such a view is called subjective idealism in modern philosophy. (III.40.29; III.55.61; VI b.13.4).

OBJECTIVE IDEALISM

The statement that there are countless individual minds, which is often made in the *Yogavasistha*, implies an extra-individual reality in the form of other individuals, who, of course, must likewise have their own world-experience. Vasistha is alive to this implication and therefore admits a cosmic world with countless objects and individuals within it, which in its original form is a system of ideas in the Cosmic Mind called Brahma. Brahma imagines

the world and all the individuals within it at the commencement of the Creation, and they continue to exist as long as Brahma continues to exist (III.55.47).

RECONCILIATION OF SUBJECTIVE AND OBJECTIVE IDEALISM

The experience of a common world by many individuals is thus due to the fact that over and above these individuals, there exists a Common Mind, the Cosmic Mind, in which all the common contents of the world as well as all the individuals themselves exist as ideas and are represented in every individual mind within the Cosmic Mind. The ideas imagined by Brahma are the common objects of experience of us all, although in our own mind they enter as our own. Or, it may also be said, they are the reals (*bimba*) of which our minds are a copy (*pratibimba*). As every mind is an idea of the same Cosmic Mind, it is capable of representing within itself other individual mind also as its own ideas. One is an idea in the mind of others as much as others are ideas in that of the one. Although nobody knows anything except its own ideas-the perception of other individuals and common things being our own ideas-, yet they are believed as existing in a common universe, for they are the common ideas of all alike. As it is possible that several men may see the same dream, so, in the same way, it happens that we will experience the same objects. (VIb.20.7; III.55.48; V.49.10; VIb.151.10; VIb.154.11; III.53.25).

WORLDS WITHIN WORLDS

The terms ‘Cosmic Mind’ and ‘individual mind’ are to be understood in a relative sense. That which is considered as individual in relation to a wider Cosmic Mind and its contents, may in its own turn be considered as cosmic in relation to the entities within its own objective experience. For, according to Vasistha, every object has a subjective aspect, *i.e.*, is a mind in which is experienced a world peculiar to itself, as in a dream. Every idea thus is a monad in itself and has a world within its experience, every ideal content of which is, again, in its turn, in itself, an individual monad having another world within itself. There is no end to this process of worlds within worlds. In this way, in every universe are contained millions of other universes, and this process goes on *ad infinitum*. All this is unknown and unreal to us, but it is directly known to those who have attained purity of mind and a vision of the Absolute. (IV.18.26, 27; IV.19.1; III.52.20; III.44.34; VIb.59.33, 34).

VARIETY OF WORLD EXPERIENCES

One need not, however, believe that all the worlds which thus arise successively or simultaneously are of the same kind, or are governed by the same laws, or are evolved in the same way as our own world. There is no such uniformity having under its sway all the world, actual or possible. Some of them may, however, be similar in their entire nature, others similar only in some aspects, others quite different from one another. So is the case with the countless individuals in the different world. The theories of creation propounded in various Sastras are only idle fancies. The Divine Mind is not bound by any particular law of creation to be followed always and everywhere. (IV.47.14; VIa.66.23; IV.47.17; VIa.66.21).

THE GENERAL LAW OF MANIFESTATION OF AN OBJECTIVE WORLD

The manifestation of an objective world within a mind proceeds by way of materialization and externalization of ideas in the form of things, body and senses, consequent upon a wish, craving or desire to enjoy the particular objects. This process can be well-understood by a study of the phenomena of dreams; for the law of evolution or rise of an objective world is the same in the case of a dream, of an after-death vision or of the rise of a cosmos. The dynamic force behind the manifestation of all objects in one's experience is the desire to be something or to have something, which the creative imagination supplies forthwith. (III.12.2; VIb.22, 37; VIa.114.17; III.4.79).

INDIVIDUALITY OR MIND (MANAS)

Individuality (*Jivatva*), according to Vasistha does not consist in being something like a simple, undecomposable, spiritual entity, called the soul. It consists, on the other hand, in being a mind, *manas*, which means a particular mode of the Ultimate Reality, determined by a peculiar movement, tendency, desire, or will to imagine. The form is in perpetual change. It is called by various names on account of its different functional forms. It is called *Buddhi* (intellect) when it knows something definitely; *Ahankara* (ego), when it assumes for itself a distinct existence, *Chitta*, when it displays fickleness; *Karma* (action), when it moves towards a desired end; *Vasana* (desire), when it attaches itself to something not in its possession; *Indriyas* (sense-organs), when it reveals external objects to the Self; and *Prakrti* (root-matter), when it creates objects out of itself. In fact, everything that we know is, according to *Yogavasistha*, a mode of mind. (III.96.3, 17-27; V.13.80, 54; III. 46.43).

The Vedanta of the Yogavasistha

Mind is not anything different and separate from the Absolute *Brahma*; it is *Brahma* Itself manifesting Itself as a creative agent. It is the whole looked at from a particular point of view (IV.42, 18; V.13.24, 53; VIa.96.19). From the point of view of grossness limitations there may be distinguished three grades in the manifestation of mind, namely, the monad (*Jiva*), the ego (*ahankara*) and the body (*deha*). *Jiva* or monad is that aspect of mind in which it originates as a ray from the Absolute Consciousness and is yet very subtle in character. The ego is *Jiva* in a grosser and more limited form in which objectivity acquires a greater degree. The body is the grossed form of the mind (III.64.12, 14; III.13.15, 22, 24, 28, 29). There is no limit to the number of monads in the world, and the monads are of various kinds (III. 43, 1; IV. 43.2, 3).

THOUGHT-POWER

As minds we have got tremendous power at our command. Thought is the most potent force in the world. The mind, according to the Yogavasistha, is omnipotent (III.11.16). It is endowed with creative power (VIb.139.1). In creating a world for itself, it is absolutely free (III. 4.79). We all attain what we aspire for. All that we intensely desire comes to us early or late. Our own efforts guided by our aspirations are the warp and woof of our identity. (III. 45.12; III.54.48). The nature of things around us is as we think it to be. Our lives are what we make them by our thought. Thoughts are the bricks with which we build the mansions of our personality. We become what we aspire to be. The world around us is the reflex of our thought. It changes its appearance as we change. The extent of space and duration of time are relative to our thought and emotions (III.56.28, 30; III. 60. 16, 17, 20-22, 28; VI b.148.33; VI b.100.3; IV. 23.13). Faith or *bhavana* is the secret of all achievements. Our perceptions are colored by our beliefs. (IV. 21.20-22, 56-58; IV. 17.4; VIa. 51.3). Even bondage and freedom are also the states of our mind and are wrought by our thought (III.98.3; III.99.43; III.115.24). The body is a creation of the mind and can be shaped by it into any form. Most of the diseases of the body originate in the disturbances of the mind and can be cured by right thinking and re-educating the mind. (IV. 45. 7; IV. 11. 19; VI. 21. 16; VIa. 28.34). If we never allow the balance of the mind to be overthrown by ambitions, cares, anxieties and worries etc., there is no reason why disease should ever lodge in the temple of our body (VIa.26.10-35). Happiness is another name for the harmony of the mind; right culture of mind is the secret of joyful living (V. 21. 12, 14).

THE SECRET OF SUPERNORMAL POWERS

The secret of attaining supernormal powers is to rise above identity with the physical body, which is another name for limitation, imperfection and incapacity of doing great things and to affirm one's being spiritual in nature and therefore full of higher powers. Through this process of constant denial of the actual limitations and thoughtful auto-suggestion and affirmation of the ideal perfections, very extraordinary powers are evolved in us (III. 57.30-33; VIa.82. 26). Extraordinary powers can also be realized through the awakening and control of the *Kundalini-Sakti* (Serpent-power) residing in the solar plexus of the body. When one has mastered the *Kundalini-Sakti*, through the control of the movements of the vital current (*Prana*), one can have communion with the invisible Siddhas (enlightened ones), can leave one's body at will and enter another, can have a vision of distant events and things, and can become abnormally small or large in size, if and when desired. (VIa. 24; VIa. 80; VIa. 81; VIa. 82).

THE SELF

The concept of the Self is different from that of the individuality. The Self is that within us which never changes in spite of perpetual change in the personality. It is the essence of the subjective aspect of the Universe. To find the Self we have to find out what aspect of us endures throughout all the levels of experience, namely, waking, dream, sleep and the "fourth", in which all the three are transcended. The self being the ultimate Subject within us, we have to find out what aspects of our personality can be made objects of our knowledge and so cannot be regarded as the Self. The Self must also be the Ultimate Source of all our movements. Judged by these tests, the body, the senses, the mind, the intellect, the ego and the individuality cannot be regarded the Self, as each of them can be transcended on one or other level of experience; as each of them is an object of our consciousness, and as each of them is moved to activity by something else from the deep within. Again, there cannot be duality between Subject and objects ultimately, otherwise knowledge would be impossible. The Self in the subject, therefore, should be identical in essence with the Ultimate Substance of the objects, the Ultimate Essence of the Universe. The Self, therefore, according to the Yogavasistha, is the Reality at the root of the Universe, which manifests Itself in all individuals and things of the world (VIa.78. 18-27; VIa. 6. 15-16; V. 73. 4; IV. 22, 33; V. 26.12; V. 34, 52).

DEATH AND AFTER

The individuality, however changing and impermanent it may be, is not dissolved with the decay of the physical body and its total dissolution by death. The body is only an external manifestation of the inner will to be, which, with countless desires and hopes, persists to continue as an individual mind and shall, as a consequence of the unfulfilled desires, surely experience another body and another world after the death of one body. What the loss of the physical body does is only that it shuts the individual from the experience of this world, which is relative to these senses. Death brings about only a change in the kind of the objective world of the individual. It shuts from us the world with which we are no longer *en rapport*. It is not necessarily a passage of the individual to any distant place, but an experience, after temporary insensibility consequent upon the shock of losing the vision of this body and this world, of a new body and a new objective world *in this very place*, if the expression can be rightly and seriously used in this connection. This new experience is, of course, not accidentally determined. It is what the “dead ones” morally deserved, although colored by and imagined in accordance with their long cherished beliefs. Having thus enjoyed the joys of “heaven” and suffered from the torments of “hell”, according to their desires, beliefs and merits, they again experience the life of this world, if any desire for the objects of this world remained potential in them. For the chain that binds us to anything or the world is our own desire. It is only those persons who have become absolutely free from desire that, having given up their physical bodies do not undergo any further experience of the worldly life. They attain, after the death of the physical body, the state of Nirvana. They cease to be individuals and become completely identified with the Absolute *Brahma*.

THE COSMIC MIND (BRAHMA)

Most of the minds reproduce rather than create actually, although potentially all are capable of the greatest creative power. But there is a mind which really *creates* ideas in his consciousness, which for others are the real things of the external world like mountains, rivers and oceans, etc., which are regarded by them as facts and things unalterable by their thought. We may or may not experience them, but these things are there. The mind which creates the objects real for us is called Brahma in the *Yogavasistha*. It is the Cosmic Mind which has imagined the world-idea. He creates the world through his imaginative activity with the freedom and skill of an artist. He is not determined by any previously existing plan; for there is none in existence or in memory, Brahma being a fresh wave of creative activity in the ocean of the Absolute Consciousness. He is the Lord of our Cosmos which continues as

long as his imagination is at work and will collapse or dissolve when he ceases from his play of imagination. The rise of Brahma in the ocean of the *Brahma* is the most mysterious fact for human mind. He is like a sprout coming out from the seed of the Absolute when it tends to evolve the objective world out of itself. The Absolute, in its creative aspect or power, in a merely playful overflow, by its own free will, comes to self-consciousness at one point, which brings about the forgetfulness of the Whole, and on account of intensity there begins to vibrate, pulsate or agitate in the form of thinking or imagining activity, and finally assumes a separate and distinct existence for itself as apart from the whole whose one aspect it is in reality. (III. 55.47; III. 3.35; VIb. 208.27-28; IV. 44. 14; IV. 42.4; VIa. 114. 15-16; VIa. 33. 21; III. 114. 10, 20; VIa. 11. 37; IV. 42.5).

THE CREATIVE IMPULSE

Brahma is regarded by Vasistha to be a wave of mentation in the ocean of the Absolute Consciousness, the *Brahma*. The cause of the rise of this ways is not an external or quasi-external force or influence. It is the Creative Impulse (*Spanda-sakti*), an inherent energy, a power of movement, a will to manifest in finite forms, of the Reality Itself, which is ever present in the Reality, either in actual operation or in potential rest. The power is ever identical with the Absolute. When the Power is active, it may falsely assume a separate and distinct reality for itself; but, when it ceases to work, it turns back to its source, and, merging there, becomes undifferentiated. In that state there is no creation. In the *Yogavasistha* the Creative Power is called by various names, such as, *Spanda-sakti*, *Sankalpa-sakti*, *Jaganmaya* and *Prakrti*, etc. (Vi a. 84.6, 3,2, 26-27; VI a. 63. 16, 14; VI a. 65. 14, 15-19).

THE ABSOLUTE REALITY

It is very difficult to say anything about the essential nature of the Absolute. What can we say of That which is the Ultimate Substance of all things, the Unity behind the subject and the object of experience, the Essence of all forms, the Ocean of Being in which we all live and move; from and in which, we, down from the *Logos* to the tiniest vermin, originate, stay and dissolve. Words fail to describe it, for they are all but linguistic symbols for things of the manifested world, and the Reality is much more than its manifested aspects. The categories of our experience are, one and all, unable to express the Reality which is in and beyond the world-experience. No aspect of the Whole can be equated with the Whole. All our concept-smatter, mind; subject, object; one, many; self, not-self; knowledge, ignorance; light, darkness; etc., etc. – comprehend one or the other aspect of the Reality, but nor the Absolute Reality as such. They prove unsatisfactory when applied to the Reality which is inherent in

everything denoted by these concepts as well as in their opposites. All conceptual moulds break under the weight of Reality. All the grooves created by philosophy to fit the Reality in are unsatisfactory, for there always remains much of the Reality that “cannot be fitted into a groove”. The Reality, therefore, if it is to be described at all, should be described in all terms, positive and negative, and not in any of the opposite terms. Either affirm everything of It, or deny everything of It, if you have to speak of it at all. Otherwise, keep silent, if you have already intellectually arrived at a synthesis of all affirmations and negations in the silent realization of the Absolute Calm, the Blissful Nirvana. (VIb. 184. 46; VIb. 52. 27; VIb. 31. 37; III. 5.14; VI b. 104, 11; III. 7.20, 22; III. 10, 7, 14, 36; III. 9. 50, 55-59; etc., etc. Also vide our *Vasistha-darsanam*, pp. 134-145).

EVERYTHING IS BRAHMA

Everything in the world is a manifestation of the Absolute Reality, the Brahma, the Eternal Conscious Blissful Existence. There is nothing here or anywhere, which is not a mode of this Reality, which, in spite of being differentiated in countless forms, keeps Its Unity intact, because It in Itself is the continuous medium in which all forms, which are such only in relation to each other, persist temporarily. One form may be separate and distinct from another form as such, but can never be separate and distinct from the Reality of which it is a form. An ornament of gold is never different from gold, with which it is ever one and identical. Bubbles, ripples, waves, etc. Are never different from water of which they are forms, and abstracted from which they will cease to be anything at all. In the same way, everything in the Universe is Brahma. We are the Brahma. “Thou art That”. (VIa. 40. 29-32; III. 100. 17; III. 1. 17; V. 57. 1-12; VIb. 60. 28).

THE WORLD AS AN UNREAL APPEARANCE

The test of reality is eternal persistence. All forms, however, persist temporarily. They, as such, come into existence and pass out of it. How can, therefore, they be regarded as real in the true sense of the term? But we cannot also say that they are unreal, because they partake of reality, however little it may be, as they persist for some time at least. They may not be absolutely or fully real, but they are not totally unreal as long as they persist for some time. A new category is required to comprehend this fact of the forms being neither absolutely real nor absolutely unreal, but persisting for some time. Vasistha calls such things *mithya* (not true), *avidya* (that which exists not eternally), *maya* (that which is not) and *bhrama* (delusion), etc. *Appearance* is the best philosophical term to express the idea behind these terms. There is another sense in which Vasistha regards the objective forms not as

realities but as appearances. As he is an idealist, to him nothing of the objective world is real apart from its appearance in the mind. The reality and existence of every world and every object is only relative to its experience. It is nothing to another percipient, like the vision of a ghost, like things in the experience of a hypnotized person. (V. 5. 9; IV. 45, 46; III. 6. 62; III. 65. 5; III. 44. 27, 41; VIa. 114, 20; III. 54. 21; IV. 1.2, 7, 12; III. 67.76; IV. 41.15).

ACOSMISM

In Itself, the Absolute Reality is, according to the *Yogavasistha*, above all changes, above all distinctions and differentiations, and above all relations. All differences and distinctions are within It, yet in Itself, as a Whole, It is a distinction less and homogeneous Substance. All the opposites – self and not-self, subject and object, being and non-being, one and many, consciousness and unconsciousness, rise and fall of individuals and world-processes, etc.-negate each other, balance each other, fuse with each other, neutralize each other into a zero, void (*sunya*), a total blankness, which is at the heart of both the opposites, neither of which as such forms the content of this timeless and spaceless Reality. Thus the *samsara*, creation, world, individuals, objects, bondage and freedom, etc – all, as such, are absent in the Absolute considered from Its own point of view, because their existence as forms is relative to some particular kind of consciousness apart from and outside which they are *nothing*. They are all like dream-objects which have no existence apart from their being perceived or imagined by some mind. Production or origination of anything is meaningless for the Absolute and from the Absolute point of view; for the Absolute everything is ever *negated*. The Absolute is everything as well as its opposite, and so nothing as such. There is no individuality, no world, no creation, no movement, no bondage or freedom from the Absolute point of view. Acosmism is the Ultimate and the Highest Truth, which can be realized by everyone, when one ceases to be interested in the relative, particular and finite appearances. (*Vasistha-darsanam*, pp. 168-178).

THE ULTIMATE SOURCE OF HAPPINESS

All creatures, says the author of the *Yogavasistha*, strive for Happiness. (VIa. 108, 20). But they seek for it in wrong places. They are under the delusion that they can be happy through worldly prosperity and possessions. All kinds of worldly enjoyments and sense-pleasures have the seeds of pain and sorrow hidden within them. No increase in our wealth, possessions and objects of enjoyment ever increases the chance of our thirst for happiness being satisfied. Even a flood in a mirage-river will not quench the thirst of a really thirsty man. No amount of dream-wealth will ever allay the suffering of a poor man. (V. 49. 6-7; V.

The Vedanta of the Yogavasistha

9. 41; VIb. 93. 39. 73, 75, 78; V. 9. 52; VI a. 78. 8; IV. 46. 3-4). The real source of happiness is elsewhere. It can be easily found by carefully observing the conditions under which we feel happy or miserable. Things as such are neither pleasant nor painful, neither agreeable nor disagreeable. It is our own attitude towards them and our relations with them that make them appear so. The same object may be pleasant, painful or indifferent to different persons and to the same person at different times. If we hanker for some object, contact with it is pleasant, and the pleasure decreases in proportion as our hankering for it diminishes in intensity. The contact with an object which is not desired by us is felt indifferently, whereas it will be felt as positively painful in case we have an aversion for the object. From these facts Vasistha concludes that pleasure, pain, agreeableness or disagreeableness of objects depends on *our own desire or aversion* and not on the objects themselves. (VIa. 44. 2; VIa. 120, 18-20; VIa. 44. 4). Really speaking, the rise of a desire in us for something and its persistence for some time are themselves a painful experience, and our obtaining the desired object is pleasant only because it relieves us from the pain of an unfulfilled desire. So, enjoyment of the objects of desire is only negatively pleasant. In reality, therefore, the presence and absence of desire are our worldly pain and pleasure respectively. (VIb. 36. 24; VIb. 68. 31). But, if desire is absolutely and permanently eradicated from the mind by right methods, there will not only be freedom from pain, but there will also be an experience of a peculiar and abiding Joy or Bliss, which only those who have experienced it know and which cannot be experienced as long as hankering for objects continues (V. 74. 24, 50). “The Joy of desirelessness is much greater than and superior to that of ruling over an empire, of the company of one’s beloved, nay, even of Heaven (V.74.44).” Joy is really the Bliss inherent in the Absolute Reality, which is our very Self. The Absolute Self is the real home of abiding and unconditional Happiness. It is the Bliss Itself for which all of us are consciously or unconsciously seeking (V. 54. 70, 72, 69). A glimpse of this Joy can be had when the mind is at peace, when it is not functioning in its usual way of thinking of this or that object, but is calm and quiet. (VIa. 44. 26, 27).

BONDAGE AND LIBERATION

In spite of thus ever living in the ocean of Absolute Bliss, we are at the mercy of external objects for happiness. In spite of our own Self being the fountain-head of Joy, we are seeking for it in the objective world. This is our trouble. This is what is called bondage (*bandha*) by Vasistha. (II. 2. 5; V. 13. 20; III. 1. 22). This, however, is only one aspect of our bondage, which assumes different forms in our cognitive, affective and conative nature. When we are bound, we are bound in all our being. In fact, we are ever one with the Infinite

and Absolute Reality, yet at the present stage of our evolution *we do not know that* (IV. 12. 2); we are in reality omnipresent and unlimited, yet *we feel to be finite*, limited and weak (IV. 27. 22, 23, 25); Bliss is the very being of us, yet we *desire* this or that object (IV. 27. 18; VIa. 10. 8), *thinking wrongly* that it will bring happiness to us (IV. 12. 12); our abiding essence is the Reality behind everything, yet we take it to be the *ego* (VIa. 99. 11); everything is within my Self and my Self is within everything, yet I limit my *interest* (IV. 27, 25) to this or that object, *prefer* this or that, *attach* myself to particular things and actions, *possess* something and reflect another. No form is real, yet we take everything to be real. All these are so many aspects of our *bondage*, release from which is called *Liberation (Moksa)*, which consists in our conscious *realization* of our being identical with the Absolute and freedom from limitations of all kinds. It is the same as the *dissolution of the mind* or individuality (VIb. 38, 32); as *indifference* to objects of enjoyment and *desirelessness* (VIb. 38. 32); as *dropping down of the world* from consciousness (III. 21. 11); as freedom from ignorance about the Self (VIb. 20. 17). This experience (*moksa* – liberation) can be realized even while one is alive, for we are one with the Absolute *here and now*.

THE WAY OF ATTAINING LIBERATION

According to Vasistha, there is no other way to attain Liberation than *Self-Knowledge*, as our bondage consists in the ignorance of the fact that we are here and now the Absolute. Liberation cannot be attained merely by living in a forest, undergoing penances (VIb. 199. 30), performance or renunciation of any kind of actions, undergoing any disciplinary practices (VIb. 199. 31), pilgrimage, distribution of alms, bath in sacred rivers, learning, performance of duties, riches, friends (V. 3. 8), fasting (III. 6. 4), Scriptures, words of a teacher, formal worship of any personal God (VIb. 176. 26), etc., etc. Knowledge alone is the means of Liberation (III. 7. 17; II. 22. 63; V. 83. 18; V. 13. 89). The saving knowledge consists in the conviction that the *Brahma* is the only reality, that everything is *Brahma*, that nothing other than the *Brahma* is real, the very Self of us. (V. 79.2, 3; VIa. 190. 5). This knowledge can be acquired only through one's own thinking and effort. Nothing else will bring right knowledge home to anybody (III. 6. 9; VIa. 118. 4; V. 12. 8; V. 5. 6). To think correctly, the mind is to be purified; purification of mind is effected through the study of philosophical works, association with the wise and cultivation of virtue (V. 5; 5; V. 21. 11). No *Sastra* or Scriptures can make us realize the Self, if we do not make our own attempts along the right interpretation of our experience, and thereby have the direct intuition of the Self (IVb. 197. 18; VIb. 41. 15). The scripture and the words of great teachers have value

only so far as they suggest to us the existence of the Self, the Absolute, of which we, at the present stage of our knowledge, are not fully aware. (VIb. 197. 19-21, 25, 29).

NEED OF SELF-RELIANCE AND SELF-EFFORT

Wisdom or Self-knowledge cannot be acquired by one who does not make earnest effort to acquire it, but merely depends on fate or God to bring it about. Vasistha is a great opponent of the belief in Fate or Destiny and the first thing that he taught to Rama was that he should be self-reliant and earnest in determining his own destiny by his own efforts. “He thinks that every individual is wholly responsible for what he is. He believes in complete Self-determination and the strength of every individual to overcome his miserable plight or to achieve anything he wants in the realm of the world or in the kingdom of heaven. Fate, for him, is not a reality other than the results of our own previous actions, which every person is bound to have, but is at the same time quite free and strong enough to modify by his present efforts” (Atreya: *The Philosophy of the Yogavasistha*, p. 128; also vide Atreya: *Vasistha-darsanam*, p. 20-24).

RENUNCIATION OF ACTIVE LIFE NOT NECESSARY

Performing or giving up of any kind of *action*, whether it be religious, moral or worldly, is immaterial for attaining liberation. It is foolish to believe that action can be given up. Life is action, thought is action. As long as one continues to be an individual and is thinking and living, one is doing some action. Renunciation of activities is therefore impossible and so is it not required for attaining Liberation (VIa. 21. 8, 6; VIb. 2. 34, 31, 42, 43). The root of action is desire or will. That is to be cut off. Personal desire and will are to be given up and not actions (VIa. 2. 44; IV. 38, 4). For Self-realization, one has not even to go to a lonely place in some forest, renouncing the worldly duties and activities. The busy home-life is no obstruction to Self-realization. It is the culture and refinement of mind which is needed more than renunciation of worldly life (VIb. 3. 26, 38).

PRACTICAL SELF-REALIZATION

Knowledge, for Vasistha, is not merely an intellectual affair. It must be lived by, otherwise it cannot stay. We have not only to *know*, but also to *be* and to *feel* and to expand *pari passu*. To know the Absolute truly, we have to expand into the Absolute (VIb. 22. 1-5). How actually to effect this expansion is, therefore, as important a problem as to know the nature of the Reality. The practical method of Self-realization is called *Yoga* by Vasistha. (VIa. 13. 3; VIa. 128. 50, 51). This *yoga* is a process along two lines, namely, *denial of*

individuality, which is the same as limitation and imperfection, and *affirmation of the Self*, which is Perfection and Peace. As our individuality does not consist of *intellect* only but also of *feeling* and *activity*, and as the Self is not only the Absolute Consciousness but also the Absolute Peace and Bliss, the practice of Self-realization may proceed along three ways, or along any one of them; for they are only three aspects of the same process, namely, (1) Intellectual conviction of not being an individual, but of being the Infinite Absolute (*Brahma-bhavana*); (2) Negation of desire, of attachment, of like and dislike, of imagining to get this or that, of possessing this or that, and of feeling to be an individual, etc., all of which are the various aspects of our affective nature; along with this negative process, we require the positive cultivation of equanimity, universal brotherhood, cosmic feeling of oneness with all beings, and love of the Self verging on ecstasy; and (3) Practice in stopping the perpetual activity of life manifesting itself in the constant rising and setting of the vital current (*prana*), which is an external expression of our being in perpetual flux internally. This stopping of the activity of the *prana* can be brought about by practice in lengthening the usually unnoticed moments of rest which occur when one current of the vital breath has set in and the other has not yet taken its rise. This moment of rest in breathing activity corresponds to that experience of rest in consciousness, however fugitive it may be in our ordinary life, when one idea has ceased to occupy the focus of consciousness and the other has not yet appeared therein. (*Vasistha-darsanam*, pp. 204-237; *The Philosophy of the Yogavasistha*, pp. 434-488).

SEVEN STAGES ON THE PATH OF SELF- REALIZATION

Although in reality the Self is ever realized and the individual ever identical with the Absolute, yet, from the point of view of the individual himself, it is a gradual process which may extend to any length of time or to several lives of the individual, in accordance with the intensity of his aspiration and earnestness of his efforts. Several stages may be marked on this progressive path of evolution of the individual consciousness into the Absolute. Vasistha notices seven. The first stage is when the individual, having come to the consciousness of the evils of individual and selfish living, aspires to transcend it (*Subhechchha*). The second, when he philosophizes over and investigate into the nature of the Self and the world (*Vicharana*). The third, when, on account of the knowledge of its ultimate unreality revealed by philosophical thinking, the individuality (mind) becomes less and less assertive and is little experienced (*Tanumanasa*). The fourth, when the aspirant begins to feel the being of the real Self within him (*Sattvapatti*). The fifth, when clinging to the objects of the world is finally

given up by rising above all desires (*Asamsakti*). The sixth, when all things are realized to be unreal from the Absolute point of view (*Padarthabhavana*), or (according to another reading) when the individual affirms himself to be the Ultimate Reality (*Padartha-bhavana*). And the seventh, when the mystic experience of being one with the Reality is realized in consciousness (*Turya*). This is the last door which opens into the unspeakable *Nirvana*. Those who live on the seventh stage are called *Jivanmuktas* (the liberated living ones). After the death of their physical body they enter the Disembodied Liberation or *Videhamukti* (III. 118. 2-16).

THE LIFE OF LIBERATION

The person who has become liberated from individuality and is yet living is called a *Jivanmukta*. His way of living is described in great details in the *Yogavasistha*. For want of space we shall quote only a summary statement of the life of *Jivanmukti*, made by us elsewhere: “He or she (for we must remember the *Yogavasistha* is not prejudiced against the fair sex and admits that women have equal right to be liberated) is the happiest person on the earth. The *Jivanmukta* is neither delighted in prosperity nor dejected in distress. Outwardly discharging all the duties of life, he is free within. He is free from the bonds of caste and creed and is polite and friendly to all. He is busy in the affairs of life, but is free from desires. He has nothing to attain, nor has he anything to give up. He is in solitude, even in the midst of worldly activities and is always above the turmoil of life.” (*The Philosophy of the Yogavasistha*, p. 72). “Having seen him, having heard about him, having met with him, and having remembered him, all creatures feel delighted (V. 39, 54). He has no longer any struggle for livelihood. The guardian angels of the world protect and support him, as they do the entire cosmos (IV. 32, 38-39).”

NIRVANA OR FINAL LIBERATION FROM THE WORLD-EXPERIENCE

Such a man (or woman) is no longer bound by the universal Law of *Karma* to undergo another birth or experience and other objective world as a consequence of his thoughts and activities in this life. He is outside the pale of the Law of *Karma*, because only those acts, mental or physical, have to germinate or fructify into future lives and experiences which are done with a *motive*, with a conscious desire to attain or avoid something. But the actions which are performed spontaneously, without any desire, motive or attachment, are above retribution, fructification and bondage (VIa. 87, 19, 21; VIb. 199. 7, 33; IV. 38. 16, 17).

The Vedanta of the Yogavasistha

Thus the sage, who has transcended all desires, is free from attachment and is above selfish willing, is beyond the pale of the law of *Karmaphala*. He is not bound by any of the actions done in his freed life to experience its consequence in this or any other life (VIa. 2. 43; V. 42. 14). His personality (mind, individuality, finitude, etc.) will be dissolved in the infinite ocean of Bliss, after the death of the present body – the effect of his previous Sankalpas (IV. 42.13). it has also to be noted here that, according to Vasistha, “it is not necessary or compulsory that the liberated individual should totally cease to continue as an individual (after the death of the physical body). He may or may not do so. Some freed sages continue to exist as individuals, of their own accord, and take part in the Cosmic activities, disseminate knowledge and help other individuals in working out their Liberation.” (*The Philosophy of the Yogavasistha*, p. 548). “The kernel of Liberation, according to him, is *conscious realization of complete oneness with the Brahma*. It makes little difference whether this occurs in an embodied state or in a disembodied one (II. 4. 5).” (*Ibid.*, p. 548).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. *The Yogavasistha*, Sanskrit Text, published by the Nirnayasagar Press, Bombay. The numbers quoted in the brackets are the numbers of the Prakarana, Sarga and Sloka of this edition.
2. *The Vasistha-darsanam* by B. L. Atreya, published in the Prince of Wales Saraswati Bhavan Texts of the U. P. Government. It is a systematically arranged summary of the entire philosophy of the *Yogavasistha*, in its own Slokas.
3. *Yogavasistha and Its Philosophy*, by B. L. Atreya, (five Lectures on the subject delivered under the auspices of the Kashi Tattva Sabha). The present paper is a summary of some of these lectures.
4. *Yogavasistha and Modern Thought* by B. L. Atreya (another series of five Lectures on the subject delivered under the auspices of the Kashi Tattva Sabha).
5. *Self-realization or Deification of Man*, Its Methods and Stages according to the *Yogavasistha* (a Lecture delivered under the auspices of the North India Theosophical Conference, Benares).
6. *The Philosophy of the Yogavasistha* by B. L. Atreya (a comparative, critical, synthetic and comprehensive survey of the philosophy of the *Yogavasistha*, together with an Introduction to the *Yogavasistha* in 800 pages).